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ABSTRACT

Realizing that the society in which today's young people are taking their place is complex and characterized by both continuity and change, this paper voices the need for improving social studies education. Social studies programs should focus on the learning which young people need for participation in society and which public welfare requires. The paper is organized under 12 headings: (1) Ample time should be given to learning; (2) Students must be actively involved in learning; (3) Raising standards; (4) What is to be learned is the significant matter; (5) Social studies programs ought to be well organized; (6) Assessment should be regular part of classroom procedures because students, teachers, and parents need evidence of students' progress; (7) Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and others in the community ought to evaluate the effectiveness of social studies curriculum systematically and regularly; (8) Social studies teachers should have the special competencies needed for teaching successfully; (9) Students need parental support; (10) Schools need community support; (11) Social studies education needs state support; and (12) Schools should be just and humane. (KWL)

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

Strengthening the quality of education in the high schools is a matter of widespread concern. Because social studies is of prime significance to both society and young people, sound social studies programs must be a part of that concern.

The society in which today's young people are taking their place is complex, characterized by both continuity and change. It is a society relying as much upon first classs education in matters of human affairs as in science and technology. At this stage young people are beginning to see themselves as workers, consumers, and political participants in a world which stretches around the globe. They are members of groups: their classes, clubs, and teams; organizations focused on community and religious interests; the pervasive, though informal affiliations, not only with others of their own sex and ethnic and racial background, but increasingly with others who are not. They are members of families. They are friends. They are also individuals seeking a sense of self-worth. All of these roles are part of citizenship in the fullest sense. All of them are learned in a social context.

While many areas of learning in school -- and out -- are helpful, it is social studies education which focuses most directly on the learning which young people themselves need for participation in society and which public welfare requires. Consequently, high schools and their communities ought to give serious consideration to the extent to which their programs reflect recommendations as those which follow.

I. Ample time should be given to learning. Although more time is not always better, less is not necessarily enough.

A. High schools should require four years of social studies, including United States history and government. It is worth noticing that recent recommendations by national and state commissions for improving high school education and the National Council for the Social Studies have supported increasing the number of years required.

B. Regular daily attendance should also be required and for the full academic year, including the school days before vacations. (Schools may want to try out special courses for students who do not or cannot attend

regularly.) Sporadic attendance means that students are lost along a sequence of study or that teachers resort to repetition or to daily lessons unconnected to previous or following work. Only regular attendance allows direction and progress.

C. Regular homework, or its equivalent provided for within longer class periods, should be expected for students. Homework assignments, when they make sensible demands, increase the learning time given to learning in social studies. High school students are, or ought to become capable of some work on their own, although teachers will need to help with attention to study skills, planning the use of time, and work habits. Of course, what is to be done in homework assignments, as in classroom activities, ought to be clear and worthwhile, not simply busywork.

D. Work in social studies should be given a fair share of students' time and effort. Overly heavy course loads get in the way of study requiring thought and individual work. Remedial or other courses should not be substituted for social studies. Out-of-school

jobs should not be allowed to crowd learning in social studies. A four-hour school day, in the expectation that students will both study and work long hours outside of school, is unrealistic. (It is time for schools to try out special programs for students who must work long hours because of necessity.) Full programs of study should be expected of twelfth grade students as of all others.

E. Class time should be task-focused on learning of satisfying quality and without frequent interruptions. Teachers and students should see what is to be done in a class session and get down to doing it. Materials ought to be at hand. A class ought to be free of the demands of loud speaker announcements, disorder, unannounced visitors, and whatever else takes attention away from learning time. In the long run, it is easier and more satisfying for students to involve themselves in a class with direction, opportunity, good humor, and a feeling of accomplishment.

II. Students must be actively involved in learning. Simply stated, students learn what they do. Passive

presence means less learning of poor quality.

A. Whatever the matter of study in high school social studies, it ought to be related to the concerns of students. This statement does not mean that what is to be learned in any one class session must have immediate and direct application in students' lives each day. The statement does mean that students have to see that what is to be learned enlarges or illuminates their social world; encourages them to develop skills they can see use for; touches their values; and explains, points directions for, applies to what they encounter or expect to encounter. Students have to see social studies education as useful and worthwhile.

Teachers have to find ways of encouraging students to express, even recognize their concerns. All too often students consider the subjects of social studies as "happening back then"; "public" issues instead of personal; and conditions "out there," not "here," and "not in our lives." Yet persisting issues in history, the widespread influence of government and law, the pervasive effects of the workings of the economy, for example, all

appear in particular forms in the lives of students.

A recognition of the worth of what is learned in social studies goes hand in hand with a growing sense of efficacy in carrying on the several social roles of their lives. Students and teachers can find useful starting points in students' roles as family members, for example, or consumers, or present or prospective workers. The beginnings and ends of units of study are especially appropriate times for relating matters of study to matters of significance to students.

B. Social studies classrooms must take into account both the differences and commonalities among students if they are to be involved in learning. High school young people are at varying developmental levels; cognitive, social, and moral. Some students, for example, read well, while others do not. Some have developed effective study skills and work habits; others have not. Some students are capable of handling abstract ideas, although others cannot do so yet; all need, in some degree or another, the concrete experiences

which ideas require. Students have differing expectations of their success in learning and in the social life of the school. Their goals and purposes are becoming clearer and increasingly diverse. Coming as they do from many sorts of backgrounds and developing various interests, students have at least some differences in points of view and preferences. Some young people find their way easily in the midst of peer pressures and competing moral claims; others do not.

Yet all students have a stake in developing their intellectual abilities and understandings. Adolescents are open to new experience. They are busy with identifying themselves and yet sensitive to their peers and others around them. Television and other forms of mass media contributed to their awareness of the world at large. High school students are often idealistic. Yet, sometimes their need for group popularity and acceptance hinders or limits the extent of their zeal and commitment to ideals. Their values come into question as they reshape those of their childhood into those they will hold as adults. All students need help in making thoughtful

decisions and learning how to make responsible choices.

Consequently, social studies courses ought to offer units of study which frame common goals and common topics for all students but with choices among learning tasks. If not every unit can meet this standard for every student, going some distance toward meeting it will offer more challenge and satisfaction to more students.

C. Learning occurs through active behavior in activities planned to promote attaining objectives. Sheer variety enhances learning. Different kinds of activities are needed for different kinds of objectives. And some activities can have several facets which encourage progress toward several objectives concurrently.

While reading and reciting, primarily from the textbook, have occasional helpfulness, daily reliance on this kind of activity limits student achievement. Instead, students in social studies classrooms can view a film or videotape or television program; interpret a

graph or map or picture; write up a summary or point of view; observe in the community; interview people; conduct a survey; take part in role-playing or a simulation exercise; take notes or outline; practice the formal steps of decision making; carry on a debate; and much more. Reading many kinds of materials, from firsthand accounts to poetry to social science explanations, and for a variety of purposes is important. Reading in the form of study is essential. Observations, interviews, and other activities in the community or elsewhere outside of school walls, can be valuable. Tied into all activities must be active, clarifying, thoughtful discussion.

The teacher's role in the discussion should be one of a facilitator--asking probing questions, encouraging greater student participation and interaction, and maintaining a classroom environment assuring respectful exchange of ideas. Customarily, teachers have dominated the "talk" in the classroom through lecture and telling techniques; more time should be given to students for discussion and interaction.

D. A wide range of instructional materials are

needed to account for individual differences, to stimulate interest, and to attain objectives.

Textbooks are surely helpful. The best of them include not only significant knowledge, but materials for developing skills and even well-designed learning activities.

In every school the textbook is the most widely used curriculum. Some textbooks are better than others. Teachers need to use textbooks in a more effective and innovative manner; just assigning the readinng of a chapter does not stimulate enough interest and enthusiasm for learning. In assigning a chapter for study, teachers can, for instance, plan for students to dramatize events, to develop games and simulation experiences, to impersonate historical characters, to draw political cartoons, to prepare television programs, to gather data from family members and neighbors to support information, and to utilize current magazines and publications to augment and substatiate information.

Textbooks do not always meet the objectives and

needs of specific schools and programs; they can become out-dated in short periods of time; and they may contribute, by omission or otherwise, to stereotyping of minorities, women, handicapped persons and others. Teachers need to coordinate the textbook with their own school's objectives and needs. They should also be prepared to use textbooks in special ways to stimulate greater interest for use by students, to compensate for out-of-date information, and to correct sex, racial, ethnic, and aged stereotyping.

Still, textbooks are not enough. Students will need to have access to and opportunity to use charts; globes, maps, magazines and newspapers; films; pictures; recordings; case studies; simulation exercises; and other types of resources. It is well to remember that ideas are communicated in many ways, not only by words in print.

Unfortunately, the materials most readily at hand frequently do not fit students' capabilities or study aimed at inquiry and decision making. When teachers share the work of gathering suitable materials, work is

obviously cut down. The school library or media center can contribute with a well-balanced and up-to-date collection of materials pertinent for what students actually need for their classes.

Teachers must be careful and thoughtful in selecting instructional materials, whether basic textbooks or supplementary materials. Well-developed criteria will prove helpful in judging whether or not materials fit the objectives; portray honestly people in our pluralistic society; recognize the variations in difficulty levels needed to match varying student capabilities; and are educationally sound and sufficiently demanding.

E. Classroom climate must be open, fair, and supportive. Both students and teachers are persons of worth and dignity and should be treated as such. The teacher's authority stems from a responsibility for promoting learning in the classroom. Both teachers and students must recognize that point.

Students should be able to express their ideas without danger of censure by their teachers or

their peers, but with the expectation that ideas are subject to the test of evidence and thought. When there are ample opportunities for interaction and discussion in an atmosphere of respect for persons and knowledge, students practice the basic tenets of a democratic society.

F. So many students and schools have found programs of community service valuable that they ought to be recommended, even required. Service can be given through voluntary work, during the school year or during the summer. Young people can, for example, participate in a get-out-the-vote campaign, tutor elementary school youngsters, plant trees around public buildings, clean up a river, or work in a children's day care center. Students need these opportunities for broadening experiences, demonstrating their capabilities, and feeling the satisfaction of responsibility. Unless schools, along with other community groups, organize these service programs, it is hard for young people to find such opportunities.

G. Teachers should be encouraged to develop significant learning experiences that take

students outside of the classroom or extend beyond the scheduled period of time. Teachers, too, need to be more flexible and cooperative with their colleagues when students ask to be excused from class because they are participating in such experiences. Although there may be some inconvenience, the value to the students and to the program should be the first consideration.

III. Raising Standards. Both teachers and students should hold firmly to reasonable and suitable standards of achievement. Although all students will not achieve in the same ways, or at the same levels, all can be expected to learn. If schools ought not to overestimate what students can do, neither ought they to underestimate. However, an emphasis on high standards must be accompanied by opportunities for remediation for students who find it difficult to meet the higher standards. Students who need help must be given help.

A. Students are responsible for their own learning; they are also entitled to suitable opportunities to do so.

B. Students should not be given credit, should not

"pass" a course in which they have not learned, met even minimal standards. When substantial numbers of students are "failing," making not even minimal progress toward objectives, teachers need to re-examine teaching methods, curriculum, general school expectations, or other sources of difficulty.

C. Unusually capable students should not be penalized with low grades simply because they have enrolled in demanding courses. Grades for students should not be determined automatically by the normal frequency distribution. The penalties of low grades discourage students from enrolling in courses otherwise proper for them.

D. The purpose of social studies education is not that of getting grades. Neither ought standards to be considered simply as grades. There are better ways to describe the several aspects of student achievement than single letter grades. However, when grades, especially single letter grades, are used, they ought to reflect actual levels of achievement. Even single letter grades inform students, parents, schools, and employers of general

achievement levels.

E. Decent standards require that students can see what an able performance of any learning activity looks like; and that students expect to be able to do it with at least some degree of success, reward for their efforts, help in improvement, and feeling of satisfaction.

F. Achievement, when young people see their opportunities to learn as fair, suitable, and worthwhile, it contributes to healthy self-respect.

IV. What is to be learned is the significant matter. What is to be learned, not simply putting in time, is the significant matter. Students tend to become deeply involved and challenged when they are attempting to learn what is clear and worthwhile.

A. High school social studies instruction should focus on helping students to achieve well thought out educational goals and instructional objectives. All of the goals and objectives should be represented somewhere in a coherent program. Teachers too, at times with the help of students, must reformulate goals and objectives for their own classes. Both

teachers and students have to understand just what is to be learned.

Goals and objectives are of several kinds: knowledge, attitudes and values, and skills. They are all related to each other and to social participation. Learning in each of them strengthens learning in the others. In classrooms they ought not to be separated, but tied together.

B. Sound knowledge: This is knowledge which deals with information useful in everyday life; ideas in the form of concepts and gneralizations; and the methods of inquiry by which knowledge has been substantiated. Such knowledge ought to represent the best of scholarship. And knowledge ought to be more basic and explanatory than that picked up from items in the daily news or than matters of mere popular interest or belief. For example:

1. The rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.
2. The role and function of law in a democratic society.
3. Persistent global issues.

4. Diverse human cultures, customs, beliefs, and value systems.
5. The history and present state of our own and other cultures.
6. Economics and economic systems.
7. How to be an effective producer and consumer of goods and services.
8. People and the environment, regions and the spatial organization of society.
9. The purposes and working of government.
10. The organization of human societies.
11. The relationships between individuals and groups.
12. The psychology of human behavior.

B. Democratic values and attitudes. Young people are deeply concerned with values. A democratic society must rely upon the schools, as well as other institutions, to foster the thoughtful consideration of core values. Moreover, since values underlie all that we do, schools can never be value-free. Far better is the recognition of attitudes and values chosen as basic in education. They include:

1. Concern for the well-being and rights of others.

2. A positive self-concept based on awareness of one's own values and respect for one's own background.
3. Recognition of the values and ethnic backgrounds and cultures of others.

4. A reasoned commitment to the principles and values which sustain a democracy.
5. Attitudes necessary for participation in society and government.

C. Skills. Important as knowledge and values are, young people must acquire the abilities to develop and use them. Skills objectives are often neglected in social studies programs. Greater emphasis, more classroom opportunities and diverse experiences should be provided for the development of skills such as decision-making, gathering of evidence, analysis of data, and valuing. Acquiring knowledge does not necessarily produce skills; skills must be practiced to be learned. Moreover, skills do not exist in a vacuum; they must be developed in social studies content. These skills include:

1. Reading, and other forms of gathering

information; writing; and such intellectual processes as recognizing points of view, interpreting, analyzing, applying, and testing generalizations.

2. Participating in groups, in such ways as presenting ideas, listening and responding in discussions, and finding means to accommodate differences.
3. Making thoughtful decisions; bringing knowledge, values, and skills to bear upon clearly understood problems.

V. Social studies programs ought to be well organized.

A. Varying sets of course offerings are appropriate in school programs. No single set of course offerings is invariably best for enabling young people to achieve the knowledge, values, and skills they need. School programs commonly and properly include selections from the following courses, although other defensible courses can be developed: United States history, world history, Western civilization, non-Western civilization, world cultures, geography, area studies, government, economics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, current problems, world affairs, specialized

topics such as law education and consumer education, and interdisciplinary courses in the social sciences, history, and the humanities.

Although most of such courses will surely emphasize some fields over others, all will be stronger by drawing upon several of the social sciences and history and related fields.

All of these courses ought to include global as well as American perspectives. All of them should foster an understanding of the concept of cultural pluralism and an accurate and positive portrayal of the heritage and roles played by various groups: cultural, ethnic, racial, sex, handicapped, and aged.

Especially at the twelfth grade level, students ought to have choices among courses organized for differing interests, purposes, and capabilities, even though courses at every grade level ought to include some choices and opportunities for interdisciplinary types of study and projects.

High school courses in United States history and civics/government should not be, as they

ordinarily are, merely repeated or expanded versions of courses offered in the middle or junior high schools. Unnecessary and unproductive repetition generally develops negative attitudes towards learning. Teachers and administrators at both levels must find ways to meet and work together on differentiating middle/junior high school and high school courses.

B. An effective social studies education requires a coherent program, not a mere collection of unrelated topics, textbooks, or courses. Student learning experiences must build on previous experiences and offer a base for those which follow. A recognized order of courses is needed for developing sequence in students' learning experiences over time. While no one order of courses for grades nine through twelve is necessarily the best, the order chosen by a district should be educationally sound and defensible.

Requiring four years of social studies should allow curriculum developers to design a coherent scope and sequence for content, skills, and values, impossible to do when

enrollment is voluntary.

C. What young people ought to learn and what teachers ought to teach can be organized in a variety of curricular designs. Several kinds of organizations, several approaches, make sense in high school courses: chronology; topics; a focus on a problem or an issue; historical periods; cultures; areas of regions; students' interests, needs, and concerns; a process of inquiry or decision making; a set of units emphasizing a set of disciplines; some interdisciplinary focus; and probably others. The main core of any curricular design is that it reflects the most valid and up-to-date facts and ideas; recent findings in research; the interests and concerns of students, parents, other citizens; and social and cultural realities of the times. Some variety in organization is more effective than adhering to one only. Moreover, the suggestions and ideas of students should be taken into consideration in curriculum and instructional planning.

VI. Assessment should be regular part of classroom procedures because students, teachers, and parents need evidence of students' progress. Sensible

assessment has to give attention to progress toward all of the objectives in any unit or course. Much too often attention goes to acquiring knowledge, important, to be sure, but not the only objective. What is assessed in school exerts a powerful influence on what students learn and teachers teach.

A. Evidence of student progress can be had from many sources. In the course of class work students develop many "products"; summary charts, maps, outlines, notes, short or extensive written papers, diagrams and graphs, posters, drawings or actual models, bulletin board displays, records of interviews, and oral reports. Further opportunities are to be held by observing student participation in class discussions, debates, role-playing and simulation exercises, and group projects. All of these can be considered in judging the adequacy of student progress.

Paper-and-pencil tests do have a place. They can focus on knowledge; they can focus on skills; they should do both. When "test" are not used solely for the purpose of assigning a grade, rating scales, perhaps, or surveys of points of view, such paper-and-pencil responses

allow students and teachers to see where they stand on value-laden matters as well.

B. Nor are getting and giving grades the only purpose of assessment. Students need more than simple markings of "right" and "wrong" and more than single letter grades. Students need to know, for example, whether their work is sufficiently comprehensive, organized, consistent, and clear. They need positive comments, not merely negative criticism. Teachers should aim to make known the degree to which students are succeeding and to offer the help students need for improvement.

C. Schools need to develop valid and reliable instruments or use appropriate standardized tests for assessing student achievement in the stated instructional objectives. It is important that the assessment program presents an objective and valid picture of student achievement. Analysis of the results of student assessment should be a continuous and an integral part of curriculum development and instruction.

VII. Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and others in the community ought to evaluate the

effectiveness of social studies curriculum systematically and regularly. Courses, units of study, learning activities, instructional materials, even whole programs need reworking from time to time. Surely evidence of students' strengths and weaknesses has a bearing on what should be kept and what should be changed, what has been successful and what needs more emphasis. Schools have not ordinarily done well in using evaluation instruments and assessment of student achievement for improving their curriculums, in social studies or in other fields. They need to do better.

A. At times a high school or high schools in a district ought to re-examine the social studies program either as a whole or for its effectiveness in some one major aspect such as global perspectives or reading abilities. Schools can use criteria for evaluating curriculum and program already available or develop their own. There are many standardized tests and assessment instruments available for use.

B. Morever, social studies teachers ought to work together in regularly scheduled departmental meetings and/or specifically appointed

committees to bring about improvement in the social studies program. Perhaps teachers are concerned with such problems as the inability of some students to write effectively, to read with comprehension, to communicate clearly, or to use research techniques. Teachers may also be concerned that some students lack interest and enthusiasm in the social studies. Whatever the matter may be, the process of revision ought to be a common part of teachers' everyday responsibilities.

VIII. Social studies teachers should have the special competencies needed for teaching successfully in the field of social studies.

A. Teachers surely need strong preparation in the social sciences/history and a decent understanding of current issues and problems. Teachers should have at least a major in the social sciences/history and should have at least three university courses, or the equivalent, in areas related to each course they teach. It is also important that teachers enlarge their understanding by keeping up with modern scholarship in the disciplines and with analyses of current issues through such means

as university courses, reading, television, in-service programs, faculty discussion groups, travel, and the programs of professional organizations.

B. Teachers ought to have a store of ideas about learning activities in social studies. Teachers should be able to help students carry out some sort of investigation in social science/history content. Teachers ought to be capable of keeping discussion of a controversial matter open, moving with direction and reflection, even when feelings run high.

C. Of course, in-service education in areas general to all teachers can be valuable for social studies teachers. School districts should provide leadership in planning in-service experiences for teachers which will help them improve their classroom behavior and lead to more effective teaching. There is a need for teachers to be knowledgeable about recent trends and innovations in social studies education. Sufficient time should be provided during the school day and the school year for social studies curriculum and instructional

program improvement. Teachers must be involved in the planning of in-service experiences and must also participate with a high degree of professionalism and commitment.

D. Social studies teachers can bring about improvement in curriculum by working closely with their colleagues from other subject areas. Moreover, participation in the activities of professional organizations can foster lively interest, fresh ideas, and a sense of supported endeavor.

IX. Students need parental support. Students need and are entitled to support at home for their efforts in social studies courses -- and all others. Families must show their interest in young people's learning by such means as discussing social affairs, helping students plan their time, providing a place for work and using the mass media as sources of information. There should be greater cooperation between learning in the home and in the school.

Students, parents, and other citizens should be encouraged to participate in improving social studies programs in schools, in organizing out of school community projects and evaluating the

effectiveness of social studies programs.

X. Schools need community support

If teachers are to have the freedom to teach and students the freedom to learn, they need the support of the community. Citizenship education demands that classrooms sometimes deal with issues which may be controversial.

The citizens in the community may occasionally raise questions about what goes on in the schools. Therefore, high schools should have written statements of policy supporting open discussions of controversial issues when difficulties arise. Such policy should be worked out by teachers, students, administrators, parents, and others representing the community.

XI. Social Studies education needs state support. The state should support social studies education with leadership and funds. At least some state monies allocated for curriculum improvement and professional development at the local, intermediate, and state levels should be earmarked for social studies education.

XII. Schools should be just and humane. Young people learn informally from the purposes and practices of

their schools. Schools themselves must be just, humane, open, and challenging. If young people are to learn to participate responsibly in a democratic society, they must have opportunities, with due regard to their capabilities, to participate in a similar, though smaller society at school. What is to be learned in social studies education ought to be exemplified in the social patterns of the school.